CLAIMS

1. A method of exposing commands in a software application program comprising:

determining a user's context within an application program; and

automatically displaying at least one command on a display for the user based on the user's context.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising automatically removing said at least one command from the display responsive to a change in the user's context.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the application program comprises a document-centric application program and said displaying does not obscure a document in which the user is working.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the application program comprises a document-centric application program and said at least one command is displayed in a modeless fashion in which the user can continue to work within a document while said at least one command is displayed.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising after said displaying, executing a command without requiring any action from a user other than selecting the command.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said determining comprises ascertaining a position of a user's cursor within a document provided by the application program.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said determining comprises ascertaining a user's selection within a document provided by the application program.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said determining comprises one or more of:

ascertaining a position of a user's cursor within a document provided by the application program; and

ascertaining a user's selection within a document provided by the application program.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein said context pertains to various tasks the user may attempt to accomplish.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein said context pertains to one or more of the following: a type of document the user is working in, a state of a document the user is working in, a cursor's location within a document, and a particular user selection within a document.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein said displaying is independent of a user selecting any displayed menu item.

12. One or more computer-readable media having computer-readable instructions thereon which, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to:

determine a user's context within an application program;

automatically display at least one command on a display for the user based on the user's context, said at least one command being displayed in a modeless fashion in which the user can continue to work within a document provided by the application program while said at least one command is displayed; and

automatically remove said at least one command from the user's display responsive to a change in the user's context.

13. The computer-readable media of claim 12, wherein the computer determines the user's context by one or more of the following:

ascertaining a position of a user's cursor within a document provided by the application program; and

ascertaining a user's selection within a document provided by the application program.

14. A method of exposing commands in a software application program comprising:

displaying a user interface comprising:

a document area in which a user can work on a document that is provided by an application program; and

a container area proximate the document area; and

automatically presenting one or more command sets in the container area based upon a task that the user is attempting to accomplish on a document in the document area.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein individual command sets are defined by context blocks, at least one context block containing multiple commands that are possible selections for the task that the user is attempting to accomplish.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the context blocks are collapsible within the user interface.

17. The method of claim 15 further comprising:

receiving user input; and

responsive to receiving said input, displaying additional commands in the container area.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said displaying of the additional commands comprises replacing any context blocks in the container area with the additional commands.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the additional commands are displayed within a user-closeable context pane.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the context pane is configured to remain open within the container area until it is closed by the user.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the context pane fills the container area.

22. The method of claim 14 further comprising automatically removing said one or more command sets without requiring user intervention.

23. The method of claim 14 further comprising automatically removing said one or more command sets when the user is no longer attempting to accomplish the task.

24. The method of claim 14, wherein the container area has an expanded state and a contracted state.

25. The method of claim 24 further comprising programmatically expanding the container area from the collapsed state to automatically display a command set.

26. One or more computer-readable media having computer-readable instructions thereon which, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to:

display a user interface comprising:

a document area in which a user can work on a document that is provided by an application program; and

a container area proximate the document area;

automatically present one or more command sets in the container area based upon a task that the user is attempting to accomplish on a document in the document area, individual command sets being defined by context blocks, at least one context block containing multiple commands that are possible selections for the task that the user is attempting to accomplish; and

automatically remove one or more context blocks when the user is no longer attempting to accomplish the task.

27. Software code embodied on a computer-readable medium which, when executed by a computer, provides a user interface (UI) comprising:

a document area within which a user can work on a document that is provided by an application program; and

a container area proximate the document area configured to automatically display commands for a user based on the user's current context without obscuring a document that a user is working on within the document area.

28. The software code of claim 27, wherein the commands are displayed in context blocks, individual context blocks containing multiple commands that are possible selections for a user based upon their context.

29. The software code of claim 28, wherein the commands can further be displayed in context panes, each context pane being associated with a context block and being selectable for display by a user from its associated context block.

30. The software code of claim 28, wherein the context blocks are stackable within the container area.

31. The software code of claim 28, wherein individual context panes replace context blocks within the container area.

32. The software code of claim 31, wherein context panes must be closed by a user when the user no longer wishes to access commands within the context pane.

33. The software code of claim 28, wherein the context blocks are configured so that they can be scrolled through by a user.

34. A computer system comprising the user interface of claim 27.

35. A method of exposing commands in a software application program comprising:

determining a user's context within an application program; and

automatically displaying at least one context block on a display for the user based on the user's context, individual context blocks containing multiple commands that are possible selections for a user based upon their context.

36. The method of claim 35, wherein said determining comprises evaluating at least portions of one or more expressions, each expression being associated with a context block and defining a condition that describes one or more aspects of a user's interaction with the application program.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein the expressions evaluate to Boolean values.

38. The method of claim 35, wherein a user's context can be affected by one or more of the following: a document type, a document state, and objects within a document that can be selected by the user.

39. The method of claim 35, wherein said displaying comprises displaying a context block having a title bar area that labels the context block.

40. The method of claim 39, wherein the title bar area is configured to enable the context block to be toggled between expanded and collapsed states.

41. The method of claim 39, wherein the title bar area comprises a menu display button that is configured to enable a menu that is associated with the context block to be displayed.

42. The method of claim 41, wherein the menu display button is associated with a menu that contains links to one or more context panes, each context pane comprising additional context-sensitive commands.

43. The method of claim 35, wherein said displaying comprises displaying a context block with a controls area that exposes the multiple commands to the user.

44. The method of claim 43, wherein a command display within the controls area is defined in HTML.

45. The method of claim 35, wherein said displaying comprises displaying said at least one context block in a modeless fashion.

46. A method of exposing commands in a software application program comprising:

determining a user's context within an application program;

based on the user's context, displaying commands that are associated with the context and which can assist the user in accomplishing a task; and

while the commands are being displayed, enabling the user to select and apply various commands multiple times.

47. The method of claim 46 further comprising applying one or more selected commands, when selected by a user, without further user interaction.

48. The method of claim 46, wherein said displaying comprises displaying the commands responsive to the user selecting from a menu that is supported by an automatically-appearing and disappearing context block that contains context-sensitive commands.

49. The method of claim 46, wherein said displaying comprises displaying the commands in a modeless manner.

50. The method of claim 46, wherein said displaying comprises displaying the commands within a context pane having a title bar that labels the context pane and a controls area that exposes the commands to the user.

51. The method of claim 50, wherein the context pane is not collapsible.

52. The method of claim 50, wherein the context pane must be closed by the user.

53. The method of claim 50, wherein the user must request the context pane to be displayed.

54. The method of claim 50, wherein some of the commands in the controls area can be context-sensitive and are disabled if they are out of context.

55. The method of claim 50, wherein the context pane includes a context-sensitive help feature that displays help information that is contextually related to a context pane.

56. The method of claim 55, wherein the help feature is accessible via an icon on the title bar.

57. The method of claim 55, wherein the help feature is displayed in a modeless manner.

58. The method of claim 50, wherein multiple context panes are stackable in a queue.

59. One or more computer-readable media having computer-readable instructions thereon which, when executed by a computer, implement the method of claim 46.

60. A method of exposing commands in a software application program comprising:

associating multiple context blocks with individual expressions, individual context blocks containing one or more commands, individual expressions defining conditions that describe one or more aspects of a user's interaction with the application program;

evaluating at least portions of at least some of the expressions responsive to a change in the user's context; and

displaying, for the user, at least one context block responsive to said evaluating.

61. The method of claim 60, wherein the expressions define conditions that describe one or more aspects of a user's interaction with a document.

62. The method of claim 60, wherein said associating comprises maintaining a table with entries for the context blocks and their associated expressions.

63. The method of claim 60, wherein the expressions are Boolean expressions.

64. The method of claim 60, wherein said evaluating comprises:

representing each expression as a tree structure having multiple nodes, each node comprising either an expression operand or an operation;

associating a value with each of the nodes, the node values being capable of changing when a user's context changes;

for some of the tree structures, evaluating values associated with less than all of the nodes to ascertain whether to display a context block associated with the tree structure.

65. The method of claim 60, wherein said evaluating comprises:

representing each expression as a tree structure having multiple nodes, each node comprising either an expression operand or an operation;

associating a value with each of the nodes, the node values being capable of changing when a user's context changes;

if a value for a particular node changes, and if the particular node has a parent node, notifying the parent node with the changed value and re-evaluating the parent node's value.

66. The method of claim 65, wherein each tree structure has a root node, and further comprising displaying the context block associated with a tree structure only if the root node changes in value.

67. One or more computer-readable media having computer-readable instructions thereon which, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to:

associate multiple context blocks with individual expressions, individual context blocks containing one or more commands, individual expressions defining conditions that describe one or more aspects of a user's interaction with the application program;

evaluate at least portions of at least some of the expressions responsive to a change in the user's context by:

representing each expression as a tree structure having multiple nodes, each node comprising either an expression operand or an operation, each tree structure having a root node;

associating a value with each of the nodes, the node values being capable of changing when a user's context changes; and

if a value for a particular node changes, and if the particular node has a parent node, notifying the parent node with the changed value and re-evaluating the parent node's value; and

display, for the user, at least one context block responsive to said evaluating only if the root node of the tree structure that is associated with the context block changes in value.

68. A data structure embodied on a computer-readable medium and configured for use in exposing commands in a software application program, the data structure comprising:

a root node having a value; and

multiple nodes associated with the root node each of which having a value, the root node and multiple nodes being arranged to defined various parent/child relationships and collectively representing an expression that defines a condition that describes one or more aspects of a user's interaction with the application program;

each of the multiple nodes representing either an operation or an operand, individual multiple nodes being configured in a manner such that:

a change in value generates a notification to the node's parent; and

a notification of a change in value from a child node causes a re-evaluation of the node's value;

the root node being configured such that a change in its value causes either the automatic display or removal of a set of context-sensitive commands that are appropriate for the user's context within the application program.

69. A computing system comprising:

a single application program configured to provide:

a single navigable window;

multiple different functionalities to which the single navigable window can be navigated by a user; and

at least one context-sensitive command area that is associated with the single navigable window, the single application program being configured to automatically change command sets that are presented to the user within the command area as the user navigates to different functionalities.

70. The computing system of claim 69, wherein the single application program is configured to provide navigation instrumentalities associated with the single navigable window, the navigation instrumentalities being configured for use by the user to navigate the single window to the different functionalities.

71. The computing system of claim 70, wherein one of the navigation instrumentalities comprises links associated with each of the multiple different functionalities to which the single navigable window can be navigated.

72. The computing system of claim 70, wherein one of the navigation instrumentalities comprises browser-like navigation buttons that can be used, in connection with the navigation model, to navigate the single navigable window between the different functionalities.

73. The computing system of claim 69, wherein the multiple different functionalities comprise document-centric functionalities.

74. A computing system comprising:

a single application program configured to:

display a single navigable window for a user to use in navigating between multiple different functionalities that can be provided by the single application program;

provide at least one context-sensitive command area that is associated with the single navigable window, the single application program automatically changing command sets that are presented to the user within the command area as the user navigates to different functionalities; and

incorporate different functionalities in an extensible manner so that the user can use the single navigable window to navigate to the different incorporated functionalities.

75. The computing system of claim 74, wherein the single application program is configured to provide navigation instrumentalities associated with the single navigable window, the navigation instrumentalities being configured for use by the user to navigate the single window to the different functionalities.

76. The computing system of claim 75, wherein one of the navigation instrumentalities comprises links associated with each of the multiple different functionalities to which the single navigable window can be navigated.

77. The computing system of claim 75, wherein one of the navigation instrumentalities comprises browser-like navigation buttons that can be used to navigate the single navigable window between different functionalities.

78. A computing method comprising:

displaying a user interface that comprises a single navigable window that can be navigated between multiple different functionalities that are provided by a single application program;

receiving user input that indicates selection of a particular functionality;

responsive to receiving said user input, navigating the single navigable window to the particular selected functionality and displaying in said window indicia of said functionality that can enable a user to accomplish a task associated with the particular selected functionality;

determining a user's context within the selected functionality; and

automatically displaying at least one command for the user based on the user's context.

79. The computing method of claim 78 further comprising automatically removing said at least one command from the display responsive to change in the user's context.

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